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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the work of an unusual kind of change facilitator lacking formal authority or educational expertise. Founded in 1993, Partners in School Innovation is a nonprofit organization that supports whole-school change efforts in schools serving low-income communities across the San Francisco Bay Area. It commits to 3- or 5-year partnerships with elementary and middle schools that have articulated clear goals, identified implementation strategies, and can use support from Partners--diverse, college-educated AmeriCorps members serving alongside teachers while implementing long-term change projects. Teams of Partners currently work with seven schools in five Bay Area school districts. By 1998, Partners had worked with 2 of its partner schools for almost 5 years. At Hillcrest Elementary School, Partners served as managers and trainers to help teachers adopt and implement Reciprocal Teaching and establish a family literacy program. At Thornhill Elementary, Partners worked as close colleagues of teachers striving to develop a schoolwide assessment system. Partners are site-based, flexible, collaborative, and expert networkers. Working with teachers in their classrooms and knowing students well enabled Partners to help teachers bridge the gap between initial learning and deep practice. Teachers need this type of ongoing support. (Contains 25 references.) (MLH)

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Partners in School Innovation: An Unusual Approach to Change Facilitation

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San Francisco, California

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Partners in School Innovation:
An Unusual Approach to Change Facilitation

By Kim Grose

Introduction

The professional development of teachers is a critical component of educational reform processes. Much of the professional literature over the past two decades recognizes the value of site-based, flexible, and ongoing support for teacher learning within the process of institutional reform (Hall & Hord, 1987; McLaughlin, 1991; Lieberman, 1995). Research has documented that change is complex (Fullan, 1994), that it influences and is influenced by individual experiences and concerns (Loucks-Horsley & Steigelbauer, 1991; Hall & Hord, 1987) and is most effective when teachers' experiences are listened to and understood within a professional learning community and particular school context (Hargreaves, 1996; Lieberman et al, 1988; McLaughlin, 1991). More recently, the research has begun to explore how such professional development can best be supported– who provides the support and what do they do? What are the skills these change facilitators, professional developers and master teachers need in order to play their demanding roles? (Loucks-Horsley & Steigelbauer, 1991; Lieberman et.al.,1988).

Educators have recognized that, "although teachers spend most of their time facilitating for student learning, they themselves have few people facilitating for them and understanding their needs to be recognized, encouraged, helped, supported, and engaged in professional learning." (Lieberman et. al., 1988, p. 152).

In 1993, a colleague and I began an organization called Partners in School Innovation that responded to this need. It was based on two primary assumptions: that public schools had to reform substantially in order to meet the needs of low-income children and children of color, and that highly-motivated young college graduates could be valuable resources to teachers in achieving such reform. Over the last five years we have seen that schools can make major strides in meeting unmet student needs, and that the "Partners" we trained could be valuable change facilitators.

This paper describes the work and experiences of this unusual kind of change facilitator, one without formal authority or educational expertise. It points to some emerging ideas about broadening the notion of who can facilitate school reform work and teacher development, what these change facilitators can contribute, and the support that they need. It also raises questions for further inquiry about the challenges their position poses, and how diversity of culture and personal experience influence both the experience of such change facilitators and their contribution to the schools.

Research Methodology

As co-founder and former co-director of Partners in School Innovation, I write this paper as a practitioner. Although trained as an anthropologist, I have assembled these data not as a formal "participant observer" but as a participant pure and simple, who questioned, reflected, and read (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Data sources include: in-depth interviews with current and former Partners, and with staff coordinators of professional development for Partners; end-year school reports; and a personal journal of observations and reflections.

The Institution

Partners in School Innovation is a non-profit organization founded in 1993 to support whole school change efforts in public schools serving low income communities across the San Francisco Bay Area. It commits to partnerships of three to five years with elementary and middle schools that have begun the process of whole school change, that have articulated clear goals and identified strategies for moving forward, and that are ready to use the support that the Partners initiative can provide. This support consists primarily of teams of diverse, college-educated AmeriCorps members who serve, literally as partners alongside teachers in implementing innovative change projects that are the building blocks for schoolwide reform.

The organization sees education in a social and political context, involving a broad range of people in school reform who share the vision that educational change can increase equity and community in our society (Freire, 1970; Meier, 1995). The

organization seeks to help schools ensure the positive development and achievement of low-income children and children of color. We chose to work with schools serving this population because we wanted to dispel the overwhelming societal assumptions that such children could not achieve (Gonzalez, Moll et al., 1993). Schools that have made a commitment to educate poor and minority children to high levels are most in need of intensive and creative support, and their success, we believe, can have the most impact on the public school system as a whole.

Teams of Partners currently work with seven schools in five different school districts in the Bay Area. This corps of 27 Partners (we started with nine), includes recent college graduates from around the United States. They are selected through a rigorous application process, bringing interest and commitment to children and education, a track record of leadership and involvement in their communities, and strong communication and interpersonal skills. They commit to two years of service, and are paid a yearly stipend of $15,000. Among them there is a wide range of cultural, ethnic, socio-economic and academic backgrounds. The organization deliberately seeks Partners with diverse interests, backgrounds and experiences, including in teaching and education reform, community organizing, social service work, advocacy, and research. This follows from our assumption that schools are important democratic institutions in their local communities, and will benefit from change facilitators and staff members who may not be career educators, but who will broaden educational dialogue with their own questions and perspectives (Delpit, 1989; Nieto, 1996; Gonzalez, Moll, et. al., 1993).

The history of education reform shows that educators at all levels participate in workshops in "best practices," but rarely have the ongoing support to integrate these new practices into their day to day lives in the school – as principals, teachers, or other school personnel – and are even less likely to spread the knowledge to others in a sustained way (McLaughlin, 1991; Lieberman 1995). Partners in School Innovation set out to support educators at the crucial juncture between first exposure and deep practice. Its design rests on the following theories of action:

- *Partners are full members of the school staff.* Working in a school four days per week, Partners are able to gain a deep understanding of the complexity of the

particular school change process (Fullan, 1994), the institutional context in which teachers are trying to implement changes (McLaughlin, 1991), and the funds of knowledge that the teachers, students, families and others bring to this context (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). With such understanding they are able to provide support that is guided by the particular needs of the people going through the changes (Loucks-Horsely & Steigelbauer, 1991).

· *Partners work as peers of teachers, neither "assistants" nor "authorities."* Because they are not in positions of authority over teachers and do not come in to schools as experts, Partners are able to engage with teachers about their practice without threatening the "safe place" that classrooms are to teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Eventually, through their work with teachers and the reflective questions they ask, they are able to help teachers revisit and hone their practices (Lee & Barnett, 1994).

· *Partners are "insider-outsiders."* In addition to being full members of a school staff and community, they are part of an outside network of other Partners and educational organizations, and receive ongoing external training. As outsiders, they recognize the resources of the broader community (Clandinin & Connolly, 1995), and with training and experience, can bring students, families, and others into the reform process. Additionally, they are supported by their outside organization in raising questions about expectations for students and issues of equity that are often difficult to raise from within.

· *Partners work on integrated projects as part of a whole school reform process.* Projects are identified as high-leverage reform activities, led collaboratively by Partners and teacher colleagues that can move practitioners from initial experimentation to deep practice (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Through careful and ongoing project management, they learn together how to assess what is needed, how to implement a new practice or innovation on a small scale, and how to engage in a cycle of inquiry around the experiment through several iterations (Fullan, 1994). In this way they deepen the experiment with a base of knowledge and experience in-house, develop increasing ownership and vision across the school community, and

manage the implementation and expansion of the innovation in a way tailored to the needs and culture of the site (Fullan, 1994; McLaughlin, 1991).

- *Given specific support and training, Partners facilitate whole school change.* Much like the "second" and "third" change facilitators described by Hall & Hord (1987, chapter 9), Partners take care of the logistics of implementing an innovation, do individual problem-solving and reflection with teachers, communicate across the school, strategize with the principal, develop materials and trainings, find resources, respond to concerns and, above all, ask questions. Both "on the job" and through ongoing training, coaching, and reflection provided by Partners in School Innovation, Partners learn many of the same skills that master teachers learn as they become coaches and change facilitators. This includes how to build trusting relationships, diagnose individual and organizational needs, manage a change process, find and use resources, plan strategically, and build the skill and confidence of others (Lieberman et.al., 1988).

What Happened?

By 1998, Partners in School Innovation had worked with two of its partner schools for close to five years. During that time, two or three teams of Partners had cycled through each school. At each site many different projects were launched, experimented with, dropped or expanded, as part of their evolving school change process and depending on changing priorities, lessons, and leadership. These two schools stand as examples of the actual work of Partners, with children, teachers, principals and the communities.

Hillcrest Elementary School

Collectively, the children at this large urban school speak more than 17 languages; 88% receive free or reduced lunch. Parents, teachers, and others in the community have come together frequently in recent years to address their concerns with low reading test scores (average 20th percentile), and focus the school's reform efforts increasingly on literacy. Between 1994 and 1995 the school leadership team and Partners in School Innovation agreed to pursue two collaborative reform projects: introduction of

a literacy strategy called Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), and an initiative to engage parents in the literacy development of their children.

The team of Partners began working with four teachers, fourth through sixth grade, who were already intrigued with Reciprocal Teaching and were interested in pursuing it in their classrooms, both to build higher order comprehension skills and critical thinking in students who were scoring well below grade level, and to change the dynamics in the classroom to more collaborative learning.

In the first year Partners were trained in the practice and helped the four pioneering teachers to make Reciprocal Teaching an integral part of their ongoing curriculum. When the teachers became convinced that the strategy was addressing their students' needs, the challenge for the Partners became one of managing a major expansion and institutionalizing the effort, while continuing to deepen the practice. How could they scale it up to become a routine school-wide practice, understood and used in the majority of more than 60 classrooms? How could they support the school in developing a collective understanding of the philosophy and consequences for children of this literacy strategy?

Over the course of the project, Partners served as project managers and trainers. They trained students and teachers in Reciprocal Teaching, recruited and trained volunteers to support Reciprocal Teaching in the classrooms, developed a guide and video, created a resource library of materials for students and teachers, observed teachers in their classrooms and provided feedback, facilitated teacher discussions on the range of ways to use the strategy, led strategic planning of the project's expansion, and collected assessment on student performance and process data on the implementation effort.

After four years, Reciprocal Teaching has spread to 26 classrooms, reaching over 800 students. Hillcrest has made Reciprocal Teaching the subject of ongoing school-wide professional development and reflection. To sustain the practice, Partners and teachers organized a cadre of older, experienced students to provide focused training in new classrooms. A former Partner, who is now the Hillcrest reform coordinator commented:

I have noticed a major shift in how much Reciprocal Teaching is a part of the fabric of the school. It was a tiny experiment when I got here three years ago; now it is taken for granted as 'something that happens at Hillcrest.' ... The bigger questions that we are all still asking are how can we ensure that teachers are practicing the spirit and the letter; that the ideas behind the practice -- not just the activity -- are being transferred and deepened.

The second major project at Hillcrest sought to engage parents in literacy projects with their children and the school. Over two years one Partner took the lead in developing a menu of activities: school-wide family literacy events; monthly classroom-based workshops called "Home-School Connections;" family homework activities; and an ESL readers program that brought adult English language learners into primary grade classrooms to read with children in English and talk about their immigrant experiences. Unlike the Reciprocal Teaching project in which a specific teaching approach had been identified and agreed upon, this project emerged from a problem – how to engage parents as partners in improving literacy?

I had to help teachers move from a disempowered, hopeless place of inaction, in which they were complaining and unable to see what they could do, to a place where they could be active about it. That maybe things wouldn't be perfect but you could keep trying and fine tune things. (KG, 1/18)

Experimental and entrepreneurial, this initiative was built on the interests of teachers who volunteered to try things out, and with the strategic, logistical and facilitative support of the lead Partner. Initially she had to feel her way; through outside field research, and careful questioning, listening and practice, she engaged teachers and parents in the experiment.

The teachers knew I was not there to do the work alone, but to help them focus and develop ways to reach out to their parents better. I let the teachers know all the pieces of the work that went into an activity so that they would know what it took and how to do it themselves. (KG, 1/18)

Two years later, when this lead Partner moved on in her career, the leadership team of the school agreed to continue the most valued activities.

Thornhill Elementary School

Thornhill is located in a low-income neighborhood of an otherwise wealthy suburban town. Of about 450 students, 67% speak Spanish as their home language; 89% receive free or reduced lunch. The school is organized into multi-graded classrooms with teams of two or three teachers sharing students. Also concerned about low literacy scores, the school has set explicit grade level benchmarks and standards for its students, and reduced its primary class student-teacher ratio to 20-1.

At Hillcrest, Partners worked as managers of implementation and expanson of projects that involved teachers in the classroom and beyond. At Thornhill, the Partners took on a different kind of role, becoming close colleagues of teachers in a school-wide initiative of assessment. Their primary work was to collect and analyze reading data, and facilitate teacher dialogue on the meaning and implications of the data.

The challenges the Partners faced included: how to support an entire school in developing a system for regular assessment and analysis, how to build a culture of inquiry on literacy instruction using student data, how to bring new and inexperienced teachers into what sometimes felt like a "mandated" reform process. They also struggled with their own personal concerns: how could they build credibility with teachers when they had little to no teaching or assessment experience themselves? How could they be sure that focusing on data collection and analysis would have any positive consequences for student learning?

Partners invested heavily in their own learning – through reading, trainings, observation and practice in classrooms, and dialogue with teachers and the school's literacy coach. At the same time they worked with primary house teachers to build the teachers' capacity in the area of assessment. Main activities included: conducting assessments with children; finding and disseminating materials and information for teachers; collecting and presenting data at teaching team meetings and for the whole school; observing teachers and giving feedback; facilitating assessment meetings; and asking questions in the context of conversations about students and learning.

By the year-end all 12 primary teachers accomplished the school's expectation of implementing assessments every six weeks for all children. Each teacher also used

individual student assessment data in some way to inform instructional decisions. At mid-year the upper-grade teachers and Partners realized they needed to investigate and experiment further with upper elementary assessments before implementing them, and that they needed to give more attention to strategies for transitioning children from Spanish instruction into English.

Emerging from this intense – and sometimes conflicted – year came several plans for further learning: an action research group of teachers on second language learning and appropriate transition strategies; an agreement among upper grade teachers to experiment with various comprehension assessments to find meaningful methods to gather information on their students; and a public engagement project that brought parents into conversations about reading standards and strategies and gave them opportunities to voice concerns and questions.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Partner Contribution

What light does the experience of Partners in School Innovation shed on the problems of change facilitation? What distinctive value might a change facilitator such as a Partner bring, and thus how can their experience broaden the field of possibilities for educational reform?

The data suggest that:

Partners are able to play the role of change facilitator because their positions and support structures are set up according to what research over the years has shown to be effective for building professional learning communities: they are site based; their work is flexible depending on the priorities and needs of people in the school; they engage in collaborative action and learning; and they gain from the network of people inside and outside the school who are in similar positions.

Working with teachers in their classrooms regularly and knowing the students well enabled Partners to help teachers bridge the gap between initial learning and deep practice. One Partner, facilitating groups of teachers talking together about their instruction, made the point that she was "making professional development really

integral to teaching and not so disconnected from specific classrooms and students. [These small groups] help the formal staff development work for people with different individual styles."

By focusing on the resources the schools have, in their teachers, students and parents, and supporting what these people can and want to do, Partners build teachers' sense of empowerment and success. At schools serving children who do not typically do well on standardized tests, teachers have a hard time feeling successful. With California's recent move to lower class sizes, the state is experiencing an influx of new and inexperienced teachers. "They go to all these workshops and hear all these things they should be doing and are not; it is frustrating and disempowering," commented one Partner who worked mostly with new teachers. "As a support provider, we help people feel successful because we identify what they *can* do, and help them do it."

The Partners' position as insider-outsiders, and non-authorities/experts is, paradoxically, an asset. Without the formal credibility of a teaching credential and experience that other change facilitators bring in with them, Partners had to work to build credibility, including learning about the school's culture and history of reform, building knowledge and skills in the particular area of their project, and developing relationships with teachers, students, and others. They had to build collegial peer relationships with teachers in order to accomplish their work, and in doing so they created "safe" spaces for inquiry and reflection (Clandinin & Connolly, 1995), and new patterns of interaction and learning essential for reform (Fullan, 1994).

Interviews with Partners showed that their position of non-authority enabled them to create opportunities for the teachers to pursue their authentic interests and deepen their practice. It also led to explicit questioning of the relationship between authority and change.

> *I had to build relationships. It made the work more genuine and empowered because the teachers wanted to work with you, they weren't doing it because you were their boss. (KG, 1/18)*

It meant that when I recruited teachers to get involved in the project, they really wanted to. Working with people who are there voluntarily means you can go deeper with them. But you may be trading off breadth. What about the teachers who aren't doing [the strategy] and should be? But, then, can you force them to do it even with authority? (CJ, 1/18)

In doing the work together with teachers, and facilitating dialogue about what questions and ideas were emerging from the work, Partners helped create ongoing "learning opportunities that engage [teachers] in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences and working with others" (Lieberman, 1995, p. 595). At Thornhill, the Partners entered an environment of frustration. Teachers had been mandated to conduct assessments without knowing exactly how to do it. Working together, the Partners and teachers built their own culture of inquiry. Initially, the Partners spent time in classrooms getting to know the students, learned the various required assessments, and conducted some of them with the students. Being a full time resource meant that they could really get to know the children and be authentic co-workers with the teachers in a way that someone coming in less frequently to the school environment may be less able to be. "It established me as a member of the team, responsible for what happened and invested in the students." (BJ, 1/23)

Within a few months the teachers began to take more notice of what the Partners were doing, and sharing from the reading assessments at teacher team meetings. "I could talk about kids in a way that they couldn't because I had done the assessments. They started wanting to do the assessments!" (BJ, 1/23)

Partners in School Innovation, the schools and individuals engaged, are trying to make a paradigm shift away from old models of school improvement, in which learning is conceived of as discrete, known, and transferred from 'teacher' to 'learner'. Reform instead, in these schools, assumes new roles and relationships for those involved and understands learning to be co-constructed and emerging from practice (McLaughlin, 1991; Sparks and Hirsch, 1997). One of the difficulties in creating collegial coaching and learning relationships between teachers and change leaders is an assumption built into the educational system that experts tell others what or how to do things (Lieberman, 1995; Clandinin & Connolly, 1995). Partners cut through this problem at a single stroke.

They are neither experts nor supervisors. They used reflective questioning and basic relationship-building skills to enable teachers to open themselves up for feedback without feeling judged (Lee and Barnett, 1994).

> *My questioning and observing was less threatening than the principal. There was no evaluation tinge to it. My position not as their supervisor was important. (BJ, 1/23)*

> *Unlike master teachers in the school, we didn't know what teachers should necessarily be doing differently in their classrooms. We were there to help change the ways that teachers taught themselves new ways to teach, based on what they learned from the students and their own experiences. (CJ, 1/18)*

The paradigm shift is difficult. Partners operate right at the growing edge of their colleagues.

> *Being a non-expert helped because teachers feel like non-experts, especially with parents. So having someone like me showed teachers that you can do it and not have some super knowledge about it. It was difficult, too, because teachers do want an expert to tell them what to do. I couldn't prove to them that the ideas we had would work. I tried to explain that it was an experiment for [the school] and that I couldn't give answers. (KG, 1/18)*

Of course there are experts, and Partners worked on teams with them – reform coordinators, literacy coaches, administrators, and parent coordinators – relying on them for support. This broad partnership supported the creation in the school of new norms for relationships and learning that contributed to school "reculturing" (Fullan, 1994).

Additionally, Partners leveraged both their "insider" and their "outsider" status. They benefited personally and professionally from an external institutional context that provided access to information, resources, and broader ideas about educational change (McDonald, 1989). In particular, in weekly meetings at Partners in School Innovation they had a space for grappling with complex issues of the role of education in social change and for raising questions as to who was successful in school and why. Drawing on the trust and knowledge they had as insiders, and gaining support from Partners in School

Innovation, they could raise questions in non-accusatory ways in their schools that others may not have been able to do.

> *Professional development at Partners helped me to constantly push myself to make sure that children of color and their families were being served by the reform strategies at our school. We were supported by the organization in asking the questions, "Are kids of color being served? Why or why not? What strategies can we learn to better meet their needs?" Many teachers appreciated that I, or other Partners, raised these questions even though they were difficult ones to talk about. (HJ, 3/25)*

Analysis of Support Partners Need

Partners in School Innovation set up a number of structures to support their corps members' learning and development. They include two weeks of intensive pre-training, weekly one-day professional development, monthly reflection with action research teams, six-monthly performance and development appraisals, a team structure, collaborative work projects (task forces), and three-day retreats twice each year.

These structures provided opportunities for reflection with people in similar roles engaged in similar struggles. They also provided information and skill development so that Partners could do their job better. Through performance appraisals and on-site coaching from staff, Partners also received feedback on their work performance.

> *I can do what I do because those are the expectations. The organization believes that I can play this role, and supports me to meet those expectations. I am not sure how they do it in a structural way, but I know that individuals at all levels support me individually in doing the job. It manifests itself in a lot of ways, by [a staff person] being on the other end of the phone when I need help with understanding some data, or by responding to my feedback and modifying reflection. (TK, 1/23)*

The exact form and content of these structures were fluid, changing each year depending on the creativity, needs, interests and experience of the Partners and staff in any given year. Key themes for skill development, in which the organization developed increasing expertise, included: the initial inquiry process into a new school community or a new project area; project management, including action planning and regular progress

reviews with key colleagues; meeting preparation and facilitation; leadership development; and leveraging resources, especially students. As the Hillcrest and Thornhill examples demonstrate, these skills were essential for Partners to be able to conduct their work.

Partners frequently voiced criticisms, since the needs of every individual were rarely if ever met in each instance (Loucks-Horsley & Steigelbauer, 1991). But while these structures and skill-building opportunities were not immediately identified as important sources of support in the interviews, they were recognized as laying a foundation for Partners' overall growth and success.

> *What stands out for me are the conversations that I had with [another Partner] after the day's training, or problem-solving with my teammate at school. But these conversations and relationships were informed by the tools and practices and values we learned at Partners. (CJ, 1/18)*

> *I appreciate the valuing of reflection at Partners. Sometimes I felt we were reflecting on the wrong thing, but the culture of reflection was something I learned a lot from. (KG, 1/18)*

The professional literature has long discussed the problems of isolation in the teaching profession and structures of school (Clandinin & Connolly, 1995; McLaughlin and Yee, 1988). Change facilitation can also be isolating work because there may be few, if any, people in similar positions on site, and because the work is global in nature and often overwhelming. Partners identified as critical the need to reduce isolation, and valued highly the mechanisms available to them to deal with the problem.

Having teammates was the most significant support mentioned by the Partners: other people who understood the school culture and the project work, who knew one another well, and who were in the same insider-outsider, non-expert position.

> *I needed to feel successful because the work is so hard. My teammates helped me feel this. (BJ, 1/23)*

There was an ability to maximize influence because you have fingers in so many pots in the school; the ripple effects were bigger, and the learning from others. (TK, 1/23)

Also highly valued were the relationship with Partner colleagues in other schools and the institutional context provided by Partners in School Innovation.

[The network of Partners] wasn't extremely useful in terms of the specific work I was doing. But being able to talk with others about the successes and frustrations was helpful: to know others' experiences and realize it wasn't just my work that was hard. (BJ, 1/23)

Questions about student success don't get asked a lot in schools normally. So, having an outside support network that asked those questions kept me grounded in what was important, and why I had come to school reform to begin with. (HJ, 3/25)

The culture and values of the school were also important in reducing the sense of being out there alone. Partners identified that key support factors included having "allies" in the school community that valued the project and wanted to be involved, and a school environment that welcomed and valued people in non-teaching roles.

It felt good that people were coming to us to get involved, that we were helping people who wanted it. Also, the culture of the school was one that welcomed people in odd roles. There were lots of non-teacher people around, and that was OK. Teachers did not see them as taking away from the classroom, but as part of a team to provide support for students. (CJ, 1/18)

Some of the primary lessons Partners learned in their unusual and often stressful positions were that change happens slowly and there may not be a "right way" to contribute to school or social change. Instead they must hold the uncertainty in their minds while continuing to work. "It has been a humbling experience. I realize that you never get to the point where you've got the right answer." (GL, 1/23)

They also learned the importance of listening to others (Lieberman, et al. 1988).

It is really hard to quiet yourself down and just listen. Listen to [teachers'] concerns and what they want to work on. Then you can help them change, rather than pushing your own ideas. People need to be ready to listen to you and what you have to say. I realized that listening to others doesn't have to change how you feel. It can just expand your view because you hear others' views. (GL, 1/23)

Challenges and Questions for Further Study

Thus far, this paper has outlined some of the understanding Partners in School Innovation gained in its first five years. But there are remaining questions to explore. In this section I will address three of these challenges and raise questions for further study.

First, the structure of the Partner role – insider-outsiders without prior educational expertise who serve for two years in a school – has all the advantages described above and the constraints. The organization invests heavily each fall in the new corps members, helping them in a crash course in school reform, team-building, facilitation, project management, and their particular project area. The schools similarly invest in their learning about the particular school culture, people, history, and norms.

It is frustrating how much time it takes to become a successful Partner. Just when you figure it out it's over. The second year the work is so much deeper and with greater impact, but you couldn't have skipped over the first year. It is just hard to have it be over. (CJ, 1/18)

While the two-year limitation is a particular constraint of Partners in School Innovation, it points more broadly to the difficulties in schools of bringing new people into a change process and "up to speed" in the dialogues of a learning community. Also, it raises the same challenges that schools face about investing in the development of its teachers, only to "lose" them to higher administrative positions. How can schools create opportunities for growth and development in a way that takes advantage both of its new, inexperienced people and its veterans?

The second challenge arises from Partners in School Innovation's deliberate commitment to build a cadre of change facilitators with a range of personal and professional interests/experience, and backgrounds. The question of how one's background and prior experience influence one's efficacy as a change facilitator has

scarcely been addressed in the educational literature. School reform processes and individuals gain from the questions and prodding that come from people outside the mainstream professional circle of educators. However, such diversity leads also to discomfort and conflict. Learning how to live with, and grow through such discomfort is a significant challenge not just for schools but for every institution and community in our society.

In recent years researchers have begun to challenge the notion that schools are culture-neutral, and to point out how schools are "dominated by the attitudes, beliefs, and value-systems of one race and class of people" to the detriment of people from minority groups (Pine & Hillyard, 1990, p. 595).

> *Educational institutions do not view working class minority students as emerging from households rich in social and intellectual resources. Rather than focusing on the knowledge that these students bring to school and using it as a foundation for learning, schools have emphasized what these students lack in terms of the forms of language and knowledge sanctioned by the schools. This emphasis on so-called disadvantages has provided justification for lowered academic expectations and inaccurate portrayals of these children and their families. (Gonzalez, Moll, et. al., 1993, pp. 1-2)*

Studies have been conducted into the experience of students who come to schools from cultural, religious, or socio-economic worlds different from the dominant school culture (Rosaldo, 1989; Phelan, Davidson and Yu, 1993). But there is little about how adults in the school influence and are influenced by the interaction between their home and professional cultures. Initial data from Partners suggests that alignment of these cultures and belief systems contributed to a sense of belonging and efficacy in work.

> *Because my mother is a teacher, and I have had lots of contact with teachers, I came in with a respect for them and an understanding of how difficult the job is. I didn't come in thinking the problem in education was the teachers, which was important in my being able to work with them. (BJ, 1:23)*

In contrast, lack of alignment with the adult school culture was experienced by some as a challenge to their belonging.

I looked like the kids, had the same background as the kids. People don't think you deserve to be there, so I had to work doubly hard to be able to speak to be heard. The experience of the students is not valued, so my experience wasn't valued either. (GL, 1/23)

Just as students choose different strategies for negotiating between their multiple worlds (Phelan, Davidson and Yu, 1993), so, too, did Partners. Some found it easier to sublimate aspects of their personal backgrounds; others struggled to reconcile their backgrounds with their school's culture. One Partner, after months of questioning whether to continue for a second year or leave, negotiated with the school and the organization to build a project more closely aligned to her personal interests: engaging parents in meaningful and respected ways in the school. "The difficulties in my first few months here with not feeling valued motivated me to stay because I realized that the school needed me. It needed a Latina on staff with 80% Latina children." She also now feels more confident about her distinct contributions. "I can show teachers what they can learn from the Latina kids."

Further study is necessary about how differences in background influence the efficacy and learning of adults in schools – change facilitators, teachers, and others. What are the actual benefits and challenges to engaging a diversity of people in the school change process? How do personal backgrounds and belief systems shape the processes, goals, and outcomes of reform? What are the conditions within a school environment that support change facilitators from backgrounds different from the one reflected in the dominant school culture? What are the implications for professional development?

The third, and related challenge comes from diversity of perspective on effective strategies for change. The mission of Partners in School Innovation was to increase achievement for low-income children in public schools through working in partnership with schools on whole school change. When Partners understood and believed in the strategy of whole school change, they felt a sense of security that they were in the right position for their own development and contribution.

The more holistic, whole school change approach is in line with my philosophy of how change can be effective in the long run. If we are going to have impact in society things need to change in a holistic way. So, for me, even though sometimes being a Partner was hard, I felt I was in the right place. (RM, 3/24)

Bringing into this work people who had experience in other strategies for social change, such as direct service and community organizing meant that the strategy of whole school change was frequently up for challenge. Whole school change as a vehicle for broader social change raised tensions and concerns for those engaged in its messy implementation in actual schools: its long-term timeline; its perceived trade-offs between focus on adult change and focus on student needs; its emphasis on structural changes without clear links to student outcomes -- these are just a few of the problems.

One Partner reflected on the strategy of working to engage parents in the education of their children from within a school rather than engaging in community organizing from the outside, or providing support to parents in "safer" community spaces.

It is hard to work in a school and do parent work. I feel like I am selling out, or selling short the parents because you can't challenge the teachers all the time, and there are only so many articles you can give them to read. It is a very indirect way. It is not fast enough and may not be the right way. (GL, 1/23)

The long-term nature of whole school change sometimes came in conflict with the sense of urgency about the need for change that the young people recruited into Partners had.

I came in thinking that schools in the forefront of reform would have some urgency and do whatever it took to change. It was hard to realize even those who were committed to improve were also thinking about what was wrong with the students, or what the District wanted. For me the work never ends... it is life work. Others have the choice not to think about it: 'I can just go home or go to another school.' (GL, 1/23)

Learning and change often came through tension and conflict. While at first one might think it best to maximize the numbers of Partners whose personal backgrounds,

interests, and experience are closely aligned with school culture and whole school change strategies, in fact we have found much value also from working through the conflict that emerges from diversity of backgrounds and perspectives.

> *The conflict and challenges ... in particular around the issues of racism, was torturous. It pushed me to think a lot about my beliefs of efficacy and impact, and the role of Partners in society. It was painful, but I learned a lot. My brain was working hard in those conversations. (CJ, 1/18)*

How can schools gain the value of working through such conflict? What should be the role/responsibility of a change facilitator? What support do they need to play such a role? These are some of our continuing questions.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Partners in School Innovation suggests that a broad range of people can provide significant value to teachers and their individual and collective learning. In order for schools to meet the changing and increasing challenges that they face in contemporary society – especially those serving low-income and minority children – teachers will need such ongoing support for their learning and growth. They cannot do it alone. Given appropriate training and support, outsiders without educational expertise can become valued inside supports to reformers within schools. However, neither this, nor any other route to change facilitation, is a panacea for school reform. Many questions remain to be studied and worked out through practice.

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